CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND FORTY-NINTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 30 May 2000, at 10.10 a.m.

President: Mr.Sergei Martynov (Belarus)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 849th plenary meeting of the Conference.

I should like at the outset to extend a very warm welcome, on behalf of all the Conference, to the new representative of Tunisia, Ambassador Hatem Ben Salem, and to assure him of our full cooperation and support.

For today, I do not have any speakers inscribed on my list. Does any delegation wish to take the floor at this stage? This does not seem to be the case. Accordingly, I would now like to report on the status of the consultations which I started last week.

You will recall that we parted before the recess in anticipation of a possible new, reinvigorated effort at the Conference, which then appeared feasible as a development parallel to events unfolding outside the Conference but one which would nevertheless have a bearing on its work. After all, one of the things on which we all agree is that the Conference on Disarmament does not operate in a vacuum and has to react to developments in the outside world.

I also informed you at our last meeting before the recess that I intended, immediately before the start of the second part of the Conference's 2000 session and during the very first days of its work, to conduct a new round of consultations to determine whether delegations, at this new stage, saw possible solutions that might unblock the situation and, if so, what those solutions were.

Accordingly, I undertook intensive consultations with delegations, including through the chairs of the regional groups.

The most important factor that emerged from my consultations of last week, and also this week, is that many delegations came back to the resumed session of the Conference on Disarmament with the sense that there was now a new window of opportunity.

As President, I should like to emphasize that this marks an important change in the prevailing mood and view of the Conference's prospects, as compared to the situation before the recess.

The consultations revealed, however, that delegations need more time to analyse in-depth the new opportunities and explore specific ways to apply them in the context of the Conference on Disarmament

It has also become clear from the consultations that the time-frame for such analysis and exploration, as well as for the formulation, if feasible, of adjusted approaches to the issues before the Conference, takes us well beyond the remaining days of my presidency.

(The President)

The consultations also reveal a clear understanding within the Conference on Disarmament that an important meeting of minds has yet to occur to enable this "climate change" to be translated into new Conference realities and, indeed, into new Conference language.

Understandably, such a meeting of minds has to occur, above all, on priority issues, issues upon which the establishment by consensus of the programme of work hinges.

As has clearly emerged from the consultations, such issues are, undoubtedly, the prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS) and nuclear disarmament. Without an agreement on the format and mandate for their consideration, a programme of work does not seem feasible. It has become abundantly clear that any stand-alone decisions are now beyond our reach and probably even consideration.

In spite of the well-known difficulties in bridging the gaps in positions of PAROS and nuclear disarmament, I continue these efforts with the delegations that are most concerned, in the hope of a successful outcome in respect of the priority issues outlined above.

It has also been indicated in our consultations that, in some areas, in particular that related to the issue of PAROS, there have been no changes in the core realities outside the Conference on Disarmament. This factor obviously affects the continued consideration of this issue in the Conference.

Along with these circumstances there are two more factors which, I believe, we as a Conference need to take into account.

One is the time factor. We are already in the middle of the year 2000 without having reached agreement even on a programme of work, not to mention any agreement on substance on the issues before us. There is not much time to spare before the end of this year's proceedings of the Conference.

The second factor is that now more than ever before, after important progress has been achieved at another disarmament-related event of major significance, the Conference can ill afford to be perceived as a far niente body.

Guided by these considerations, I proposed in the course of the consultations that, without detriment to a most intensive and persistent effort in the continued search for consensus on major issues and, thus, on a programme of work, the Conference might, at a point in time that it deems appropriate, engage in a focused plenary consideration of each of the issues from a comprehensive list before it. This could be a temporary, contingency option which would eventually lead to a normal programme of work.

I will not elaborate further on this proposal at this stage since I have already done so in my meetings yesterday with all the regional groups.

(The President)

I am grateful for the constructive feedback I received from regional groups and China on the contingency proposal. It was indicated at the presidential consultations yesterday by two regional groups and China that they supported in principle the idea of focused plenary meetings, to be considered later if necessary, while, at the current stage, the President and the Conference should concentrate, fully, intensively and as a matter of urgency, on the possibility of coming to agreement on major issues and a programme of work. One regional group particularly emphasized that, prior to further consideration of the contingency option, every possible effort must be made to explore the new window of opportunity for a programme of work. I cannot agree more strongly on the need for a really hard push on the priority issues. It is this that is reflected under the "Priority action" sub-heading in the contingency proposal. In order not to detract from the efforts to reach consensus on major issues, I am not submitting this proposal as a formal one. Instead, it has been made available to delegations informally, in a non-paper format and in language accommodating the remarks received, through the secretariat for possible consideration at a later stage, if the Conference deems it appropriate. At this late hour, though, the Conference would, in my opinion, be wise to hedge its bets.

In the meantime, I am grateful for the renewed mandate accorded to the President, as a matter of urgency, to continue his efforts to hammer out an agreement on the programme of work and major issues. Over the forthcoming days, as I serve out the last days of my Presidency, I will continue with this effort, which was launched early last week.

Since there have been no comments on issues at today's meeting, this is my report on the consultations and this leads me directly to the concluding part of my plenary statement. I see a delegate who wishes to take the floor. I give the floor to the Ambassador of Pakistan.

Mr. AKRAM (Pakistan): Mr. President, since I am unlikely to have another opportunity, let me take this opportunity to express my delegation's satisfaction at seeing you preside over the meeting of the Conference and for the sincere efforts which you have made to advance the work of the Conference, even at this late stage in your presidency.

I have asked for the floor essentially because I believe that there can be no disagreement with your objective analysis of the situation that confronts the Conference. On the core issues, where disagreement has bedevilled our work, that is, on PAROS and on nuclear disarmament, my delegation does not see any early possibility of agreement, because in our discussions to date of these issues we have not envisaged a mandate which would involve negotiations in the Conference. This Conference a is negotiating body, and therefore, any machinery that we create or any mechanism that we set up which is not designed for negotiations is beyond the mandate of this Conference.

In the circumstances, my delegation felt that your idea of holding focused plenary meetings devoted to the various issues that are before us was a useful way of enabling the Conference on Disarmament to commence substantive work on these issues. The rules of procedure of this Conference provide that the work of the Conference shall be conducted in

(Mr. Akram, Pakistan)

plenary meetings and then they add: "as well as under any additional arrangements agreed by the Conference." Therefore, the absence of agreement on subsidiary bodies and their mandates cannot prevent this Conference from engaging in substantive work in plenary meetings, and this I understood to be the substance of your proposal.

My delegation, of course, could not totally endorse the language as presented in your informal paper but, in our view, there was indeed no need for a special language or special formal proposal to enable this Conference to get on with the job of addressing the substantial issues that it has before it. And even at this time, if you were to propose, under the rules of procedure, that a plenary meeting be held on a substantive issue or on successive issues, I believe that it would be quite unreasonable, and contrary to the rules of procedure, for any delegation to object to the holding of such a substantive meeting addressing a particular issue that is before this Conference. At least, that is the interpretation of my delegation. It would be unreasonable. Yes, you would require the consent of the Conference to hold the meeting, but for any delegation to oppose the holding of such a meeting would be contrary to the expectations of the rules of procedure of this Conference. Accordingly and in summary, my delegation would encourage you to put your proposal for a decision to the Conference and to enable this Conference to begin its substantive work on the issues that you have identified.

To wait in the expectation that we will reach agreement on a mandate and machinery, which has escaped us for so many months over the past year and a half, would in my opinion be an act not only of optimism - not to speak of the euphoria which some entertain after the interregnum of our meetings - but of an optimism bordering on unrealism, which will further retard the work of this Conference.

Thus, my suggestion to you would be to put your proposal in simple form in terms of the rules of procedure to the Conference for a decision, and my delegation for one would be very happy to support it.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Ambassador of Pakistan for his statement. Is there any other delegation wishing to take the floor at this point? I see none.

With regard to the proposal which was distributed on my behalf, I would like to say that this proposal, in my opinion, remains at the disposal of the Conference and delegates and, if the delegations and the members so wish, my delegation - even after I have left the post of President - will be prepared to continue work on this matter, with the consent of the Conference.

If there are no other remarks at this stage, I shall now proceed to the concluding part of my plenary statement as President.

I will not put you through the torture of a philosophical essay under the guise of concluding remarks but will limit myself to two brief observations.

The first is the following. Although the Presidency of the Conference on Disarmament is not an entirely enjoyable experience, I would propose that, in the future, the mandate of the

(The President)

President be extended to eight working weeks, instead of four working weeks as it is now. In fact, I am moving this proposal precisely because Belarus will only get its next turn as President long after my retirement.

Seriously, I would hope that this proposal could be discussed in the future deliberations on the improved and effective functioning of the Conference on Disarmament, because the current brief term envisaged in the rules of procedure does not give the President the opportunity to pursue a proposal to its logical conclusion, especially when delegations feel that they need more time. Of course, that could be precisely what the drafters had in mind when they drafted current rule 9 of the rules of procedure, envisaging just four weeks.

This is my second observation. In the fine tradition of the Conference on Disarmament, I will now declare the exact opposite of what I stated just a moment ago. I have immensely enjoyed working with each and everyone of you, Ambassadors and members of delegations. I have enjoyed your willingness to engage, to explore options, to be open-minded, if not forthcoming. I have enjoyed highly professional, top-of-the-line assistance from the secretariat.

My special thanks go to the regional coordinators, Ambassador Ali Khorram of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ambassador Kálmán Petőcz of Slovakia and Ambassador Bjørn Skogmo of Norway. I am particularly indebted to the Secretary-General of the Conference, Vladimir Petrovsky, the Deputy Secretary-General, Abdelkader Bensmail, and all the staff of Conference Services.

My very best wishes to go to my successor as of next week, the Ambassador of Belgium, Jean Lint. I very much hope that delegations' new, forthcoming positions will ripen in good time for him and the Conference to reap their fruit.

As I have indicated, I will continue my consultations on the major issues before the Conference until the end of this week and, accordingly, I am available to delegations at any time during this period.

It only remains for me to announce that the next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 8 June 2000, at 10 a.m.

I say good-bye to those of you whom I will not be in a position to contact in the coming days, and wish the best of luck to all of you.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.